

Increasing awareness on prevention of HIV/AIDS in the Clients of Sex workers influencing their safe sexual practices

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ABSTRACT:

Risk reduction models have documented that awareness about HIV prevention to the individuals, who are prone to high risk sexual practices, helps to practice safe behavior. The males who solicit sex from women by paying are highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Efforts are taken by mass media to create awareness on safe sexual practices. Interventions are done in the State by NGOs in creating awareness on the disease and skills for safe behavior. TAI conducted a study among the client of female sex workers (CFSW) to find whether increased awareness on HIV/AIDS has resulted in safe sexual practices. This study was conducted annually (2005 – 2009) among the clients in the locations where sex was solicited. 1250 of them were interviewed in 12 districts of Tamilnadu. A structured questionnaire was used to study the background characteristics, the behavior and practices of the clients. The average mean age of CFSW was 32 years. Majority of them were literate, 88.6%. The average percentage of unmarried women was 35% and 44% reported that they were married. Their correct knowledge on acceptable ways of preventing the spread of HIV without any misconception increased from 48.5% to 76.4%. Their consistent condom usage in their last sex with the sex workers increased from 59.6% to 86.3%. However, their condom usage with non-paying female partners is comparatively low. It was 19.8% in the year 2005 and 27.5% in the year 2009. The voluntary HIV testing behavior was at 98% across the years. The study showed that the increasing knowledge had direct influence on their safe sexual practices such as consistent condom usage.

Key words: Clients of sex workers, safe sexual practices, paying female partner.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing the awareness on prevention of disease is important to bring changes in practices and behavior. In HIV/AIDS prevention creating awareness on the prevention of the disease and the modes of transmission of the disease helps to increase the safe practice and behavior of the individuals. In Tamilnadu efforts have been taken by health departments and the nongovernmental organization to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. The National AIDS Control Organization and Tamilnadu AIDS control society and other players conduct mass and mid media campaigns to create awareness to the general public on importance of safe sexual behavior. It is important to understand whether the individuals advanced to change process and understand that they are at the risk of diseases and make decision to change the behavior. They should also develop skills to change their behavior. The behavior change in sexual relationships requires information from health personnel as well as dialogue with the sexual partners [1]. In Tamilnadu sex trade happens in a very clandestine manner. The majority of HIV infections documented in Tamilnadu are heterosexually acquired. The men who solicit sex from paid female sex workers are at the higher risk of getting infected with HIV and also act as a bridge for carrying the disease to their non-paid partners [2]. The different locations where the men solicit sex are brothels, lodges and on streets. The place of solicitation and place where the sex happens are different. It has been difficult to study why men seek sex outside marriage. The sex trade as a profession has been in existence

from the historical days of Devadasi system. Experts from Focus Group Discussion with truckers, slum dwellers, men who travel for menial job etc. have revealed that they solicit sex because they have to stay away from their wives for many days together [3] “the sex workers are available in resting places of truckers.....many of us have joined private company for trucking and the time we spend out of our family is high and sex outside marriage happens”. Female sex workers are in poor position to negotiate safe sex because of socio, economic, cultural and legal factors. There are many studies conducted which has documented higher prevalence of HIV in female sex workers [4]. The community prevalence study conducted by AIDS Prevention and control project in year 2002 documented the HIV prevalence among sex workers was to be 9% [5]. The Integrated Behavior and Biological Assessment study conducted by ICMR in the year 2007 and in the year 2009 has concluded that the burden of Sexually transmitted diseases among the sex workers has declined, specifically the Syphilis [6]. In Tamil Nadu intervention efforts are at present targeted on core groups like sex workers who are vulnerable to HIV. The general public and the bridge populations who are prone to high risk behavior get information from mass and mid-media. However they were special targeted intervention to bring about behavior change among Truckers, Youth in slums, injecting drug users etc. In addition to the Targeted intervention efforts were taken to increase the accessibility of the treatment services for Sexually

Transmitted Diseases for males through key clinics specially designed for them.

In this paper the trends in awareness and behavior among the male clients who visit female sex workers is presented. The behavior change in them is important for controlling the epidemic since women may fail to negotiate for safe sex when men refuse, for the reasons like need of money and violence from the clients. The study finding showed that the increasing awareness on the methods of prevention of HIV and the increasing perception of risk of contracting the disease have increased the safe sexual practices of the male clients.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study was to track the following indicators across the period of five years to understand the whether knowledge and perception of risk has influenced on changing the unsafe behavior.

- The proportion of male clients who solicit sex from female sex workers level of awareness on methods of prevention of HIV/AIDS
- The proportion of male clients who solicit sex from female sex workers who are consistently using condoms in their last sex
- The proportion of male clients who solicit sex from female sex workers perception of risk of getting infected with HIV/AIDS
- The proportion of male clients who solicit sex from female sex workers who have got tested for HIV in the last year

METHODS

DESIGN

The study population Male clients of sex workers were interviewed in the places where they were soliciting sex. Respondent driven sampling methodology was adopted to select the respondents. The sampling universes were the districts which had intervention efforts implemented for female sex workers. Structured questionnaire was constructed to measure the indicators. It was pre tested and the findings were incorporated in the final questionnaire. The investigators of the study were trained and the questionnaire was standardized. The respondents were requested to give their consent for participating in the study and they were also given the option to stop the interview if they did not like to continue. The study was conducted annually, since the years 2005 to 2008.

SAMPLE:

The sample size in the year 2005 was N=1497; in the year 2006 was N =1418; in the year 2007 was N=2690; in the year 2008 was N = 2772. The study was conducted in 8 districts of Tamilnadu in the year 2005 and year 2006. In the years 2007 and 2008 the study

was conducted in 13 districts of Tamil Nadu. The districts where the survey was conducted were Coimbatore, Salem, Madurai, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Thiruvallur, Vellore, Tanjore, Namakkal, Dindigul, Theni, Karur and Erode. The survey captured the socio-demographical variables of the respondents such as age, education, marital status, literacy level and the indicators.

The operation definition of the population group which was surveyed, - Men who solicited sex with a paid woman sex partner in the last month.

MEASURES

The Structured and pre-tested questionnaire which was used for the study had questions to capture the background characteristics of the respondents and the measures on the indicators which were the objective of the study. The questionnaire was in regional language Tamil. The investigators were trained to understand the sensitiveness of the information which had to be gathered and also the locations where the interviews would be conducted. They were strictly instructed not to coerce any of the respondents. They had to assure the care which would be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the information shared by the individual respondent. The investigators were supervised by a senior team leader to ensure smooth data collection and redress the bottle necks while selecting the respondents or during the interview. The salient information which were collected was to understand the knowledge level, The survey captured the following, Profile of the respondents, Level of knowledge on prevention of HIV/AIDS, Self-risk perception of contracting HIV/AIDS, Practice of consistent safe sex, Practice of getting tested for HIV etc..

INTERVENTION

In the state prevention efforts to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS was done intensively for general population and also for special groups which were vulnerable to get infected with HIV/AIDS. The clients of sex workers were from general population however they belonged to certain occupational groups which were more exposed to paid sex for varied reasons. Some of the groups were Truckers and their helpers, migrants who lived away from their family for work etc.

Different donors and government programs conducted mass media and mid media programs to create awareness on importance of being faithful to wife, using condoms while involved in sex with multiple partners, benefits of getting tested for HIV, importance of getting treated for sexually transmitted disease etc. Many Non-governmental organizations had implemented awareness program in the groups like

Truckers and Helpers, migrants, Youth living in slums etc.

To quote few thematic media campaign were Pulli Rajavukku AIDS varuma (whether pulli Raja will get AIDS), Dillu Durai (Bold Durai), Right Ranga etc. These campaigns personified characters that disseminated information on importance of safe behavior and consistent condom usage. The recent Dillu Durai campaign had characters which represented the common man with doubts about HIV. It was documented that the campaign increased the knowledge and HIV testing behavior of the people in the district of Cuddalore in Tamilnadu, in the year 2010. The campaign took over a total of 48,965 people who were screened for HIV [7]. The Red Ribbon Express reached out to the people across the state with the messages on prevention, care and support and fight against stigma [8].

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The collected questionnaire was subject to quality check by the supervisors. The questionnaire was coded and the data were double entered. The data were analyzed in SPSS software.

RESULTS

The findings of the study are presented and discussed in this paper.

Background of the Clients of Female Sex Workers

The mean age of the Clients of Female Sex workers was 31 years, 96 percentage of them spoke Tamil as mother tongue, 90 percent of them were belonged to Hindu religion; 5.9 percentage were Muslim religion; 3.4 percentage were Christians. 90 percentage of them were literates and 65 percent of them studied up to the class 10th.

The primary source of income is in table 1. The clients of female sex workers who were interviewed their primary source of income were being an auto driver, laborer, agricultural workers, petty business, Rickshaw pullers etc.

The marital status of the respondents is in table 2. Half of the clients of female sex workers were married and living with wife, 49.39 percentage and 34.6 percentage were unmarried, 5.83 percentage were widowers, 2.5 percentage were married but living with some other partners.

Knowledge on HIV/AIDS

Figure 1 shows the knowledge level of Clients of sex workers on condom use while engaging in sex across

the years. Figure 1 shows the use condoms always for Sex – CFSW

The knowledge level of clients of sex workers on the importance of using condom during was always high. It could be observed that the knowledge level was above 99% in all the annual surveys (Figure 1)

Figure 2 shows faithfulness to one partner for preventing HIV –CFSW.

The next important knowledge on faithful partnership in sex is found to be high and it is above 85% in all the annual surveys. (Figure 2)

Figure 3 shows the condom use behavior in the last sex- CFSW

The clients of female sex workers were asked whether they had used condom in the last sex with the paid partners. The Figure 3 shows the increasing trend in the condom use behavior in the last sex with the paid partners, 89 to 92%, in the years 2005 – 2008. (Figure 3)

Figure 4 shows the consistent condom use behavior in the last sex- CFSW

The clients were also asked whether they had used condom every time when they had sex with the paid partners in the last month. 59% of them reported of consistent condom usage in the year 2005 and it increased to 79% in the year 2008. (Figure 4)

Figure 5 shows the reasons for not using condom in the last sex- CFSW

The clients of sex workers who did not use condom in the last sex were asked for the reasons for it. In the year 2005 28.9% of them stated that their partners refused; 9.2% stated condoms were not available and 42% stated that they did not like using it. 19.7% said that they had no time to buy condom, while interpreting the data it had to be kept in mind that it was a smaller proportion of clients of sex worker who had not used condoms in the last sex. It could be observed that there was a decline in the year 2008, clients stating partner refused 3.6%; condoms were not available 3%; did not like using it 11.92%; did not have time to buy condoms 12%. However 23.5% stated that condoms were not necessary (Figure 5)

Figure 6 shows condom not used against wish- CFSW

The clients were asked whether there were any incident in which they did not use condoms in the last one month. A minimum proportion of 8% reported in the years 2005 and 2007 and it was 17% in the year 2006. However, it decreased to 5.6% in the year 2008. (Figure 6).

Figure 7 shows the reasons for not using condoms – CFSW

The clients were asked the reasons for not using condoms against their wish. Some of the reasons were partners' refusal, condoms not available, condom breakage etc. It could be observed that clients stating partner refused decreased from 26.7 % to 12.3%. However the other reason stated was condom breakage which was at the average of 2%. (Figure7)

Figure 8 shows any person seen, infected with HIV- CFSW

When asked whether they had seen any person infected with HIV, the proportion of them reporting yes to it was at 44% in the year 2005 and it had reduced to 16.8% in the year 2008. (Figure 8)

Figure 9 shows that they got tested for HIV in the last year – CFSW

The proportion of clients of female sex workers getting tested for HIV remained high was above 95%. (Figure 9)

Figure 10 shows knowledge on the results of HIV test – CFSW

Nearly all the clients of sex workers who got tested for HIV had got the results of HIV test. In the year 2008 4% of them had not got the result after getting tested. (Figure 10).

Figure 11 shows the perception of risk – CFSW

Among the clients of sex workers who reported that they had not used condoms. The perception of risk contracting HIV was low at 10.7% in the year 2008 and it was low even in the earlier annual surveys. (Figure 11)

Figure 12 shows the exposure to Media Advertisement on condom – CFSW

The clients of sex workers were asked whether they had seen media advertisements on condom as protection of HIV/AIDS. In the last two annual surveys it could be observed that higher percentage of them was exposed to media advertisements on condoms. (Figure 12)

Table 1. Primary Source of Income of respondents (clients of female sex workers who were interviewed)

Nature of Work	Percentage
Auto Driver	16.01
Laborer	13.73
Factory worker	5.05
Office worker	1.22
Government worker	10.34
Transport worker	1.98
Student	5.62
Businessman	3.4
Agricultural worker	9.02
Petty business	9.82
Construction worker	5.97
Hotel worker	1.18
Riksha puller	16.01

Table 2. Marital Status of respondents (clients of female sex workers who were interviewed)

Nature of status	Percentage
Unmarried (living alone)	34.6
Unmarried (live-in-partner)	2.15
Married & living with Wife	49.39
Separated	3.93
Divorced	1.05
Widower	5.83
Married but living with some other partner	2.55

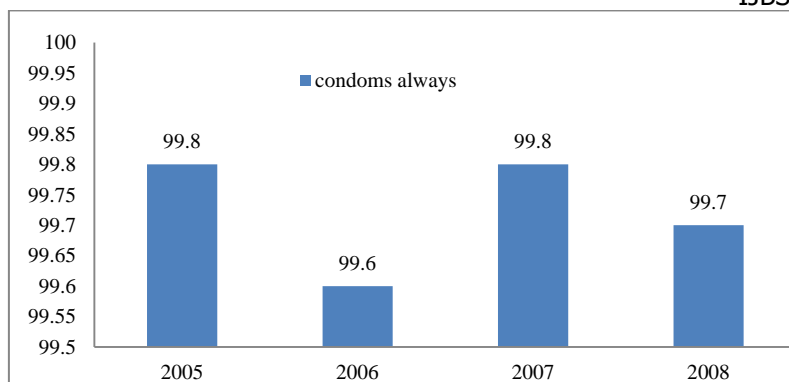


Figure 1. Knowledge level of Clients of sex workers on condom use while engaging in sex across the years

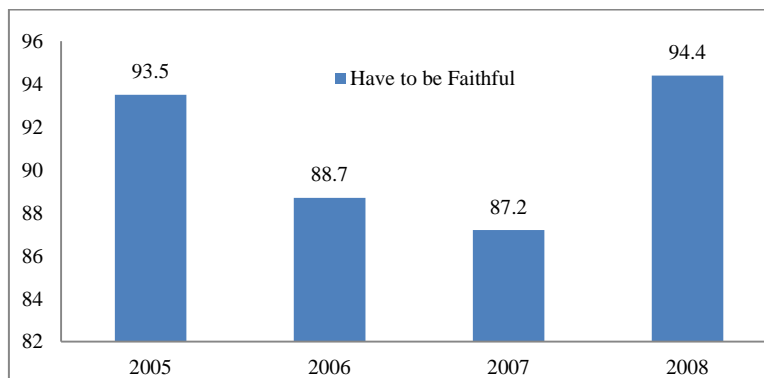


Figure 2. Knowledge on faithful partnership in sex

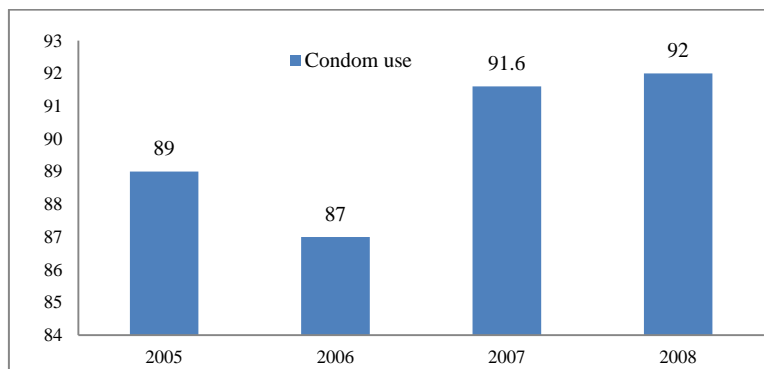


Figure 3. Condom use behavior in the last sex with the paid partners

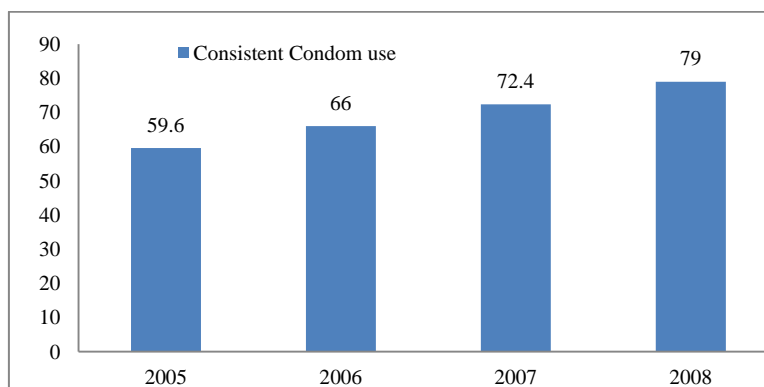


Figure 4. Consistent Condom use behavior in the last sex with paid partners

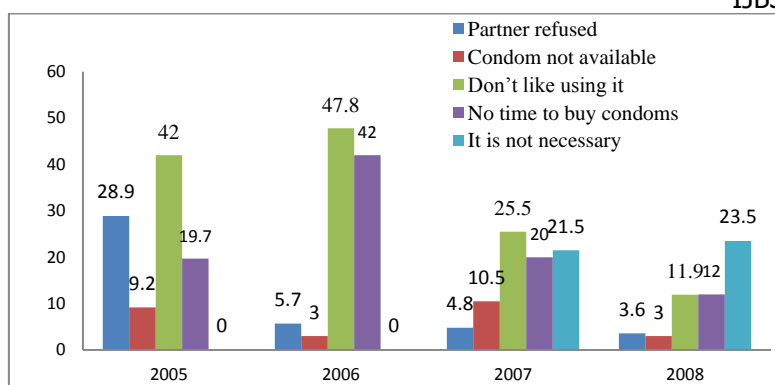


Figure 5. Reasons for not using condom in last sex with paid partners

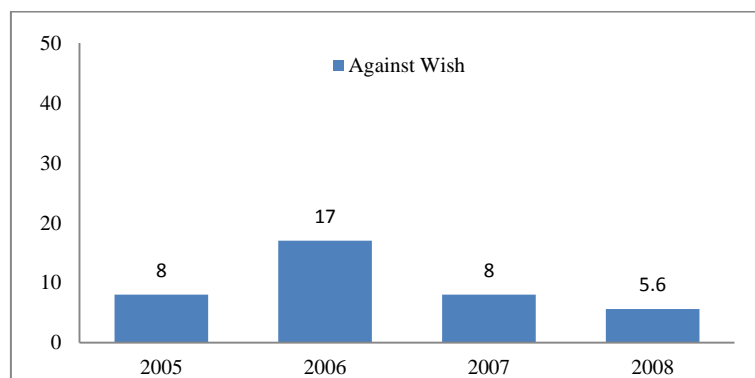


Figure 6. Condoms not used against wish to use condoms during sex with paid partners

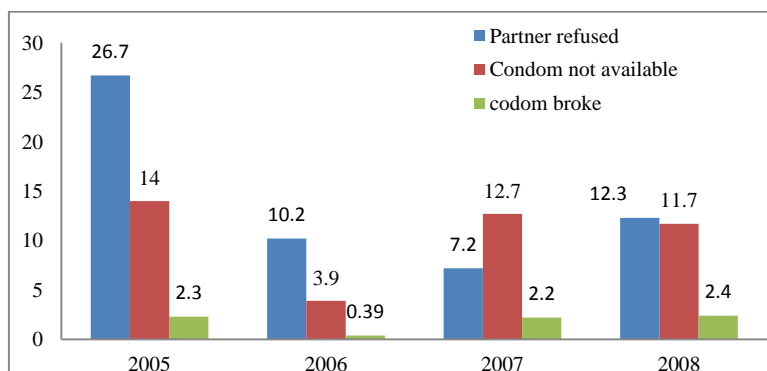


Figure 7. Reasons for not using condoms against their wish to use condoms during sex with paid partners

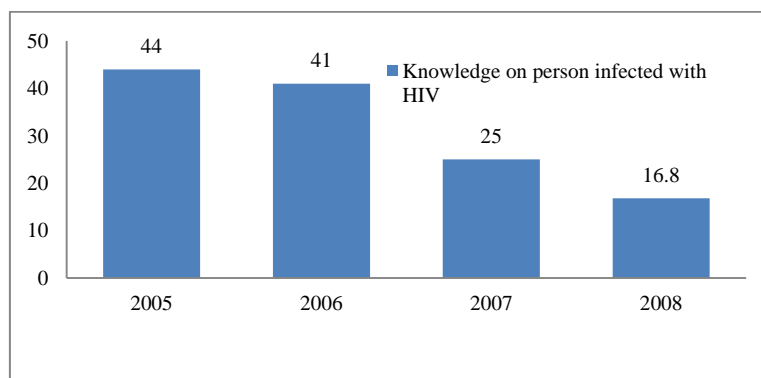


Figure 8. Knowledge regarding any person infected with HIV

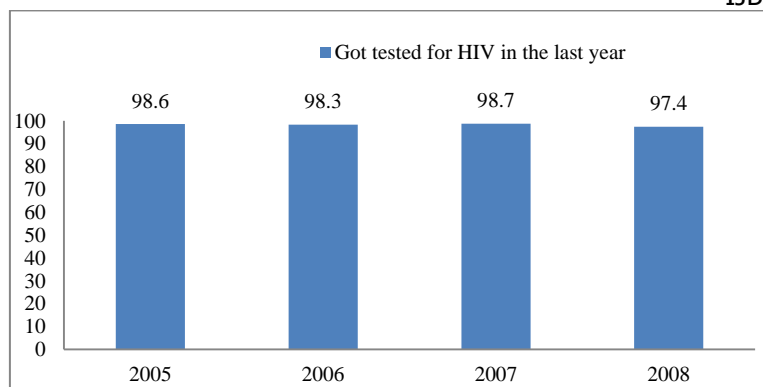


Figure 9. Proportion of clients of female sex workers tested for HIV in the last year

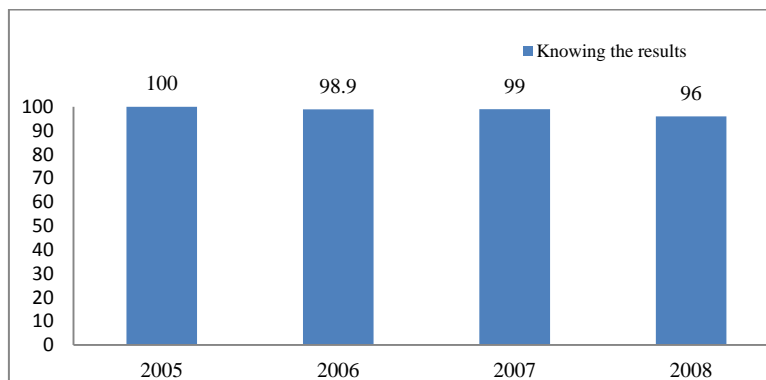


Figure 10. Knowledge on the results of the HIV test

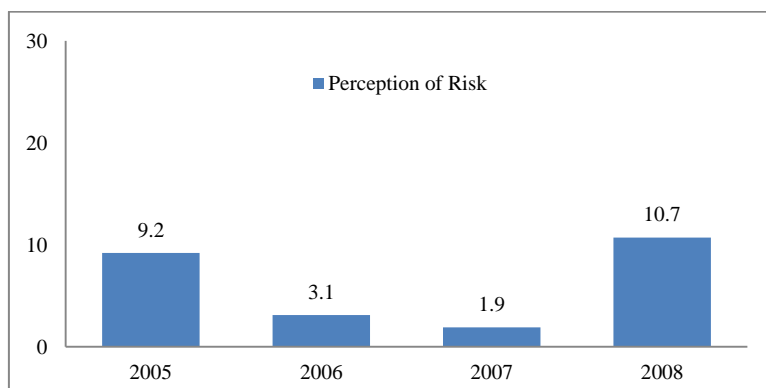


Figure 11. Perception of risk of contracting HIV during sex with paid partners

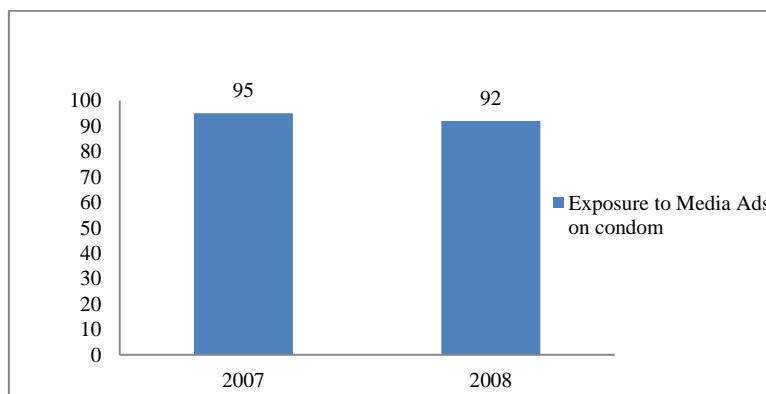


Figure 12. Exposure to Media Ads on condom

DISCUSSION

This paper presents the findings from survey which was conducted to understand the awareness of prevention of HIV and safe sexual practices of the clients of female sex workers in Tamilnadu. The analysis of the survey has helped understand the socio demographic profile of the clients to solicit sex from commercial sex workers. Further it has helped understand the sexual behavior, safe practices, perception of risk and their exposure to information on prevention. The mean age of the clients across the annual survey is 31 years and their exposure to first sexual intercourse with the female partners, 19 to 21 years old, 40.7%, 22 to 25 years old, 32.5%, 26 to 30 years old, 7.5%, 31 to 35 years v, .08%, 36 to 40 years old, .03%. It is evident that these men were exposed to first paid sex 19 to 21 years old. The mean age of first paid sex of the female partner is, 19 to 21 years old, 19.37%, 22 to 25 years old, 38.4%, 26 to 30 years v, 28.9%, 31 to 35 years old, 8.3%, 36 to 40 years old, 2.25%. It is evident that these men were exposed to first paid sex 19 to 30 years old.

Half of them were married and living with wife, 49.39% and 34.6% were unmarried. The nature of work which the clients of sex worker were doing auto drivers, government workers, agricultural worker, petty business, rickshaw pullers, (more than 10%). It is important to note that 5.6% of the clients of sex workers stated that they were students. This profile of the clients of sex workers could be used for prevention messaging by implementing organizations.

Knowledge on prevention and safe sexual practice was high among the clients of sex workers and it increased across the years for example the knowledge on the importance of using condom always for sex was 99%, and the message to being faithful to one partner for preventing HIV was also high at 94.4% in year 2008. In the last 2 annual surveys the clients of sex workers got exposed to media advertisements on condoms as prevention; it was more than 90%. When these two information knowledge on prevention and exposure to media was compared with their condom use behavior in the last sex. It is interesting to note the increasing the trend in the condom usage in the last sex with the paid partner from 89% to 92%, in the years from 2005 to 2008. It clearly shows that media had an important role to play in increasing the knowledge on condoms. It is important to study the behavior change among male clients for developing programs. Similar such efforts were taken in countries like Vietnam. The formative research findings were used by them to design intervention to increase personal risk perception and to promote safer sexual behavior among male clients with female sex workers with the focus on consistent condom use [9].

However, the information which is concern is that consistent condom usage of the clients of sex workers was only at 79%, in the year 2008, though it increased across the years from 59.6% to 79%. When asked the reasons for not using condom in the last sex higher proportion, 28.9%, in the year 2005. However, the reason partners refusing had decreased over years and now it reached to 3.6%. It could be attributed that the knowledge of sex workers on prevention and importance of condom usage had increased across the years. Similarly the reasons that condoms were not available were 9.2%, in the year 2005 and it has decreased to 3% in the year 2008. A sustained effort to make condoms available for the clients would be important. 42% of the clients of sex workers stated that they did not like using condoms which has decreased to 12%, in the year 2008. The next reason that they did not have time to buy condoms was again an information of concern, 19.7%, in the year 2005, 12% in the year 2008. The data on the reasons for not using condom in the last sex was from a smaller proportion of respondents who did not use condoms.

A smaller proportion of the clients of sex worker stated that they had not used condom against their wish in the last sex, 8% in the year 2005, 5.6% in the year 2008. The reasons which they stated of the partner refusal, condom not available, and condom breakage. The reason of condom breakage was at the average of 2% which would be important to note. This information highlighted the importance of awareness program to be sustained for both female sex workers and their clients. The study has not understood why the paid partner had refused condom usages. It is assumed that they would have sex for higher price or the clients should be a person who had sex with her regularly.

The state of Tamilnadu enormous efforts have been taken to increase the knowledge on benefits of getting tested for HIV. NGOs and other stakeholders and also various donors and the government played a major role in conducting campaigns and interventions. Higher proportion, more than 95% of clients of female sex workers had got tested in the last year. It is also interesting to note that more than 95% of them they also got their test results. The study did not ask about their HIV status. However, it is believed that after knowing the HIV status the individuals would take decisions for their future in particular to adopt prevention methods or if deducted positive they would enroll in the ART program.

The study explored the perception of risk among the non-users of condoms in the last sex. It is apparent that the perception of risk is very low 9.2% in the year 2005 and 10.7% in the year 2008. It can be assumed that their less perception of risk could be the reason for not using condoms. The context of risk perception in

relation to sexual behavior could be the first stage towards behavior change from risk taking to safer sex [10]. In the public health intervention, it is an important marker to promote safe sexual behavior in the context of HIV prevention programs [11]. In addition to the media campaigns it becomes important to motivate the hard group which had not used condoms and which also had low risk perception. The study has not explored the reasons low risk perception. However, peer mediated intervention could help increase the perception of risk to make decisions for safe behavior [12].

LIMITATIONS

Some of the limitations of the study include impossibility to collect data on HIV status. The study was not able to get descriptive information to explain certain trends/behaviors observed in the study

CONCLUSION

The study findings have highlighted the changing trend in the behavior and knowledge. It can be concluded that the increase in knowledge has resulted in safe sexual practices. Media campaigns have helped to reach out the clients of female sex workers. The study has highlighted the area of concern for sustaining the behavior change and also addressing some of the gaps. It is difficult to collect data on sexual behavior in the place of the sexual soliciting. However this effort has proved that if methodology and training skills to the investigators would help in collecting sexual behavior data successfully.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TAI acknowledges the research organization SRI IMRB for conducting this survey. The strenuous efforts of the investigators who manage various bottlenecks during the study are place on record of appreciation.

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